

THE OREGON DESERT

That was between you two. But this simple grandmother, with her generous hospitality...

head. He fastened them there with the polished ebony handles of his brushes.

Then he took her by the shoulders and held her at arm's length to study the effect.

But she met it with steady eyes. The innocence of her own heart made her take on a dignity which conquered the man before her.

"Laurel," he said suddenly, "you are a goddess. Great heaven, why cannot I have you always as I have you now?"

"You kin hev me," she said in her slow, tender tone that pulsed and trembled as she spoke.

There were gentleness, innocence and reserve in her nature. It shook the shallower one.

"Good evenin, pretty clouds. Good evenin, ole Mount Hood, sweet evenin to yo'."

CHAPTER IV.

Another week passed, and Wilnot grew furious as he missed his companion day after day.

"Skill, there's fascination in these great distances and mighty hills."

The cattle king bared his fine head and looked out toward the Cascades, standing like immense cones, sometimes shoulder to shoulder, often entirely alone.

McAlvord went on to look after his men, while in his visitor's heart there rang out like the voice of a bird.

"He became sure that it was not good for him to be here. He was growing morbid. His great American novel would never be written at this rate."

With the beginning of May Mrs. McAlvord, the host's mother, would come.

Wilnot was not with the others when this complaint in its final strength was entered upon.

After a time Craymer became restless and complained that he must do something beside sketching merry people in stylish clothing—however picturesquely they might be "set."

"My reason for speaking," said Wilnot, "is that I would warn you, Craymer. You are an attractive fellow and"

"Thanks, awfully!"

"This is not play," said the other fiercely. Then calming himself, "You are to be married soon?"

"Not until September."

"Well, September is coming," he insisted in a Nemesis tone.

"Yes, of course. Why do you ask?"

"For this reason: With that answer I want you to relinquish going where you intend to go tomorrow."

"And by what right do you ask it? It's about time that your volunteer espionage should cease."

Wilnot by a strong effort smothered the indignation that stirred him and, following him, laid a hand upon his shoulder and said in gentle tone: "I beg your pardon."

"Why don't you go there yourself and take her out of those brutal surroundings? You haven't been foolish enough to bind yourself to any one. There are ways of getting on with it. Some elderly aunt or maiden cousin could chaperone, and 'twould take blamed little worldly contact for her to outshine them all. I say," he insisted with a sort of fur, "why don't you do it?"

Wilnot ground his teeth. "You have done your best to make it impossible," he answered.

An eruptive denial rose to Craymer's lips, but for once he grew manly.

But this time Craymer followed and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"I be goin' to see him," she said.

He was filled with an undefined sense of terror and tried to dissuade her.

They rode swiftly into the "scabby desert," with its alternations of clayey and sandy soil.

The gray and dismal ride was in harmony with the thoughts of both.

When they reached McAlvord's fertile land, they rode more slowly until they came upon a stream.

Laurel went swiftly forward along the shaded drive. The sun was gone, but the afterglow spread its radiance over the earth.

So fair a vision of life had never before greeted her eyes, nor had it entered her happiest dreams.

Human forms were the jewels in this enchanting scene—strong men and graceful women.

She read with anxious eyes, but saw no line of care or illness upon the gay features she had learned so well.

He seemed to assent to something this one asked of him, for she went through a doorway, upon either side of which hung fleecy curtains, and returned with a strange something in her hand—something that she held out to him and that he took with another smile into her face.

The next morning she said to her heart, "He beant comin today."

The next morning it was the same, and the next, and so on for many days.

He began to sing some words in an unknown tongue which thrilled her through and through.

There must be something to make a heart stand still at the first sight of a face crowned so shinningly.

She had never before seen any one with golden hair. That of the child was flaxen, but dun of color like the fog that sometimes lay dank and cold about the mountains in winter, while this was gloriously warm like the sunlight and strayed over the fair forehead in little waving lines.

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him; he could not come. It did not enter her thought that he might not come even if the something had broken his grasp.

"He be sick," she asserted with sad conviction.

The next day passed without his coming. Her thoughts grew sadder.

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to his lips. His head was against her shoulder. His words were low, but Laurel's heart interpreted the tone.

She sank upon her knees and with a faint cry would have fallen but that the youth caught her about the waist and dragged her along the turf beside the drive, so that their footsteps made no sound.

He untethered the horses and lifted Laurel upon her own.

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Fast Express, Augusta and Washington, with Through Sleepers to New York.



She could watch him all the way down the hill.

"I always lift my hat to Mount Hood."

stream was in his ears. It went singing down its rocky way into the bottomless pool as merrily as if it had not been stranded on the wrong side of the range...

Wilnot by a strong effort smothered the indignation that stirred him and, following him, laid a hand upon his shoulder and said in gentle tone: "I beg your pardon."

Wilnot ground his teeth. "You have done your best to make it impossible," he answered.

eyes must of necessity follow. But as yet no shadow touched her. She went about in her life of toil and privation while her heart was filled with a sacred quiet.

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